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**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Presents
2004 National Wetlands Group Conservation Award
to the Machias River Corridor Coalition**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – July 1, 2004 --The Machias River Corridor Coalition -- a partnership between private industry, environmental groups, state and federal agencies -- is being honored today with one of the nation's top environmental conservation awards, in recognition of a landmark 2003 agreement which ensures wetlands conservation in Maine.

Steve Williams, the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, presented the 2004 National Wetlands Group Conservation Award to the Machias River Corridor Coalition today in a ceremony at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, 2 Massachusetts Avenue, in Washington, D.C. The award recognizes excellence in the development, restoration and enhancement of wetlands nationwide. The ceremony was held in conjunction with the Federal Duck Stamp unveiling.

"We're absolutely thrilled to receive such a prestigious award," said Dave Lieser, Northern region manager-Forest Resources for International Paper, one of the partners in the Machias River Corridor Coalition. "It is quite an honor, and our IP team members consider it a privilege to be recognized with so many outstanding organizations."

The Machias River Corridor Coalition represents a model partnership between International Paper, The Nature Conservancy, the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission, and the Maine Department of Conservation. Additional support came from many other organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Machias River Watershed Council, the Downeast Rivers Land Trust, the Quoddy Regional Land Trust and Trout Unlimited. Maine's Congressional delegation worked hard to secure more than \$4 million in federal funding for the project. Together, these public and private organizations purchased and conserved nearly 25,000 acres and more than 210 miles of Machias River shoreline. The Machias River project ensures critical habitat conservation, public access and sustainable forestry in Maine.

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"From its inception, the Machias River project has been a shared vision between local residents, industry and government partners," said Maine Department of Conservation Commissioner Patrick McGowan. "This collaborative effort has successfully protected the ecological, recreational and economic value of an outstanding river system -- one that truly defines the unique outdoor heritage of our state."

The more than \$7.8 million project, which runs from the outlet of Third Machias Lake east to Whitneyville, enhances critical habitat for Atlantic salmon in Maine through the protection of 4,283 acres of wetlands and hundreds of miles of rivers. The National Wetlands Group Conservation Award recognizes this collaborative effort, which helps to ensure the long-term protection of riparian wetlands and endangered Atlantic salmon habitat in the Machias River System.

"This project is pretty incredible," said Stewart Fefer, project leader for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Gulf of Maine Coastal Program. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect an entire river corridor."

Atlantic salmon, which were officially listed as an Endangered Species in 2000, will be able to spawn and nurture juvenile fish in the Machias River habitat. The agreement ensures that 86 percent of the endangered Atlantic salmon habitat in the Machias River System will be protected for perpetuity. The Machias River habitat is home to 20 percent of the remaining wild Atlantic salmon spawning and nursery habitat in the United States.

Under the terms of the Machias River Corridor agreement, conservation easements encompass wetlands, forests and rivers -- including 1,000 feet on each side of the Machias River and six major tributaries. New construction and development activities are prohibited within the easement areas.

"Because of this model, partnerships like this are becoming the standard mode of operation in Maine where non-profits, business, and government are seeking ways to work together rather than finding excuses not to," said Tom Rumpf Acting State Director of the Maine Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Public access for traditional backcountry recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, canoeing, camping and hiking -- which are currently provided by International Paper -- is guaranteed forever, according to the agreement. Sustainable forest management for wood harvesting, which is designed to enhance wildlife habitat, will be managed under the guidelines pioneered by International Paper. "The Machias River is considered to be one of the jewels in the state of Maine," said Lieser. "International Paper is proud to be part of such a significant project."

Funding for the project came from a variety of public and private sources including a \$2 million grant from the Federal Forest Legacy Program, a \$2 million U.S. Fish and Wildlife Recovery Land Acquisition Grant, \$2.8 million in matching funds from the State of Maine's "Land for Maine's Future" Board and \$400,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Nature Conservancy raised more than \$1 million in private funds to support the acquisition and stewardship of the project.

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“A lot of work was done by all the partners to finalize this deal,” said Pat Keliher, executive director of the Atlantic Salmon Commission. “To see all that hard work recognized by a national award makes it all the more gratifying. We are truly honored.”

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL PAPER

International Paper (<http://www.internationalpaper.com>) businesses include paper, packaging and forest products. As one of the largest private landowners in the world, International Paper foresters and ecologists manage the woods with great care in compliance with the rigorous standards of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative program. The SFI program is an independent certification system that ensures the perpetual planting, growing and harvesting of trees while protecting wildlife, biodiversity, plants, soil, air and water quality. In the U.S. alone, International Paper protects more than 1.5 million acres of unique and environmentally important habitat on its forestlands through conservation easements and land sales to environmental groups. The company also has a long-standing policy of using no wood from endangered forests. Headquartered in the United States, International Paper has operations in more than 40 countries and sells its products in more than 120 nations.

ABOUT THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The Nature Conservancy is a private, nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to the protection of the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Since its founding in 1956 by Rachel Carson and others, the Maine Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has protected nearly 675,000 acres of Maine’s finest wildlife habitat. With the help of more than 11,000 individual, corporate and foundation supporters and numerous volunteers, the Chapter owns and manages Maine’s largest system of privately-owned nature preserves. Approximately 900,000 members support the Conservancy’s work internationally, and the organization has grown to be the nation’s tenth largest nonprofit.